'Final Affair': exercise in sleaze

TELEVISION

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THE FACTS

- **The film:** "Marilyn & Bobby: Her Final Affair."
- **When:** 9 tonight.
- **Network:** USA Network.
- **Starring:** Melody Anderson, James F. Kelly, Richard Dysart, Raymond Serra and Thomas Wagner.
- **Our rating:** ★

★★★★ — don't miss it; ★★★ — worth your while; ★★ — has its moments; ★ — if you must; Ø — don't bother.

After you watch the TV movie "Marilyn & Bobby: Her Final Affair" (airing at 9 tonight on cable's USA Network), the urge to take a shower and wash off the stench radiating from your television set is overwhelming.

Here is a film based entirely on the speculation that Marilyn Monroe and Robert F. Kennedy had a passionate affair in the final months of her life, a life that ended 31 years ago this week.

There isn't a shred of evidence, irrefutable or otherwise, to indicate that the liaison actually took place. But no matter. It is in the best interests of "Marilyn & Bobby" that you believe it happened because otherwise there is no movie.

Get the picture?

The USA Network never has been all that concerned with letting the facts get in the way of a good story, and it is even less so here. Consider this disclaimer run at the beginning of the film: "This is a fictional account inspired by the public lives of Marilyn Monroe and Robert F. Kennedy."

I think this means that both Monroe and Kennedy were famous, and, inasmuch as they lived during the same period in human history, they were as likely to have had an illicit affair as any other man and woman who walked the Earth. Hard to argue with that.

A further USA press release calls the film "a blend of fiction and speculative journalism."

In other words, "Marilyn & Bobby" is a fantasy about what might have happened based on decades of tabloid rumor, which in the dirt-obsessed 1990s is as good as foolproof. Too bad for the surviving family members. Too bad for the surviving widow.

It is all the more galling that "Marilyn & Bobby" is such enticingly tasty rubbish: energetic, titillating and breezily produced. And it has the reigning Bobby Kennedy

James F. Kelly and Melody Anderson star as Robert F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe in "Marilyn & Bobby: Her Final Affair," at 9 tonight on cable's USA Network.

look-alike in actor James F. Kelly, who has played RFK in four other television movies.

Kelly is the best thing about "Marilyn & Bobby," portraying Kennedy in this decidedly negative depiction with a ruthless abandon and a lust for Monroe bordering on obsession.

Looking less like her subject but radiating plenty of fragile allure is Melody Anderson as Monroe. She's all flitty eyelashes, swerving hips and wanton sex appeal, painting a portrait that is at once sympathetic and pathetic.

And boy, does Marilyn love those Kennedy boys.

Marilyn: "Jack is a big kid in a candy store. But Bobby is different. He's more . . . serious. I like that."

There is also plenty of unintentional camp comedy to chew on in "Marilyn & Bobby."

At one point, Kelly, as RFK, actually approaches Monroe at a party and lays this lame line on her: "How, as an actor, can you get in someone's mind? I mean, how can *I* get inside *your* mind."

As if it's Marilyn's mind he wants to get into.

The Bobby we see in the film is far afield from the larger-than-life hero of popular lore. He is, in fact, a cover-his-backside lout who has his footprints all over Marilyn's deathbed and went into denial mode to smooth over his tracks.

This RFK is also a guy who barbecues his enemies, including the notorious J. Edgar Hoover (well-played by "L.A. Law's" Richard Dysart), mobster Sam Giancana (Raymond Serra) and Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa (Thomas Wagner). And naturally, the movie can't help but show Hoover in bed with another man.

Put it all together and you have one sleazy exercise. "Marilyn & Bobby" is a mythic creation in the most heinous sense — one presented under the guise of possible truth.

More than any violent television film in recent memory, this one could use a parental advisory. Something like this: "The following film has no redeeming value whatsoever and should be viewed only by people who enjoy confusing the actual and the illusory.

Ray Richmond talks about television on the "Channeling" Newsline. Call (818) 883-6397, Ext. 8888. New message every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.